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THE SCHOLAR'S POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY.¹

A feature of recent presidential elections has been a distrust of the educated class. It is the day of the plain people ; and a claim to superior knowledge often injures a man's chance of gaining a hearing. It may seem, then, that this attitude of the public makes the scholar in politics a superfluity. What I hope to show, however, is that it creates a demand for scholarship of a high order, and that it offers to scholarship of this superior grade a larger field of influence than has ever before been open to it. The uprising of the plain people is the opportunity of the true scholar.

The knowledge that is to be a political power is not, indeed, of a kind so advanced that it cannot be imparted to the public. As there can be no esoteric politics, no knowledge that is worth anything in politics can bear a label of exclusiveness. Government is by the people. There should be a certain communism in the holding of intellectual property that is needed for public uses. Yet knowledge that is not at present common property must in some way make itself effective in the politics of the future. If it comes in the form of clear demonstrations it will be welcomed. The great democratic power that rules the state — except when bosses rule it and the state — is still ready to welcome one thing from any one who may offer it, namely, light. It knows its own interests and is glad to learn how to promote them. If any man is able to reveal the occult forces that, when they are understood, make for prosperity, he has something to offer that is as welcome as are compass and chart to a navigator. To the man who really grasps principles and understands what to the multitude are, as yet, mysteries, there is now open a larger field for political influence than any historical situation known to me has offered.

¹ An address delivered at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of a chapter of the Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity at Amherst College.

The political system is taking its color from the industrial. The contests of the factory and the shop are more and more often fought over again in the larger field of party warfare. There are facts about our industrial system, some of which have recently been discovered, that will take some of the bitterness out of such contests. These are accessible to the men of the school and they are important to the men of the shop. I wish to point out a few of these things that genuine scholarship now sees, and that it can enable any one to see, if he will fairly examine the proofs.

The first fact that needs to be known is all-comprehensive. It is nothing less than the truth as to whether the present industrial system is worth keeping. Is the competitive system of creating and distributing wealth legitimate? Does it promise much for the future? One is startled by the assertion that so general a question has become a political issue; and yet it has become so. Socialism is no longer a mere speculation: it has emerged from the study in the shape of certain concrete and radical demands. Behind these are powerful bodies. We are asked to take industries, one after another, into the hands of the state, till, in the end, the government shall be the only employer of labor. Deep in the hearts of the men who make these daring and revolutionary demands is a conviction that the competitive system of industry is at bottom bad. From this theoretical view a whole genus of political movements takes character. It is the people as a whole who must meet the practical issue that this theory involves. Shall we strengthen the industrial system or shall we weaken it? Shall we keep it forever and let it evolve after its own nature, or shall we sweep it away and substitute a different system? It is the people who have to decide. The fundamental character of the social system is in debate, and the policy of nations is to be determined by the verdict that the common people will render on this subject.

Concerning the social system there are three views, any one of which a reasonable being may hold. That society is all that it ought to be, is not one of the three. That it

is tolerable, and is very good when it is let wholly alone, is one of them. This is the extreme *laissez-faire* position. Again, that society is wholly bad is not a possible view. That its fundamental tendencies are evil, however, is possible, and is the opinion held by socialists. The system, they say, has incidental features that are good ; but the forces that at bottom control it are making it worse and worse. The great abuse alleged is the systematic plundering of laborers. Competition, it is said, causes this ; and so long as competition continues, the plundering cannot be stopped.

Finally, it may be held that society, while full of evils, is fundamentally sound. The forces that at bottom dominate it, one may say, are working rightly. They work against the evils of the system and will steadily reduce them. Ultimately they will redeem the social state if we only secure for them a free field. This is a view the grounds of which I wish to indicate.

The first and second of the views that I have stated preclude much effort at reform. They make society, in the one case, so good that it does not particularly need to be reformed ; and, in the other case, so bad that there is no use in trying to reform it. The third of the views that I have cited—the one that I regard as the true one—makes every man a reformer. It gauges his moral quality by the amount of energy that he is willing to spend in trying to remove evils ; but it gauges his intellectual quality by the intelligence that he uses in the operation. If the social state is at bottom sound, there is something to be done for it. There are things to be cast out and things to be rescued. What, as I claim, educated men may know and ought to teach, is that society is fundamentally sound and therefore worth reforming. This first article of faith for an active citizen is not to be proved without intelligent thinking. Educated men need, further, to know and to teach how to reform it. Socialism is fascinating and dangerous because it promises, not to reform, but to regenerate society, and to do it in a cheap and rapid way. It has the advantage of telling us just how this is all to be done, namely, by letting the state become the sole employer of labor.

Almost any movement is strong if it proposes a definite remedy for public evils. "We intend to tax land up to its full rental value," says one party. If you object, there comes the quick retort: "What do you propose?" If you say "Nothing," you are lost. "We intend to debase the currency," says another party. If you say: "That will rob creditors, paralyze credit and drive gold into holes in the earth," the rejoinder is: "What is your remedy? We must do something." "I think," says the old-time doctor, "that your liver is out of order. I will bleed you and give you calomel." "But," protests the patient, "that will derange my system and make me weaker." "Have you, then, a remedy to suggest?" demands the doctor. "Alas, nothing but the curative forces of nature." In such a case pill and lancet carry the day. Similar results follow on a large scale when some men have violent cures for social diseases, and we suggest no alternative except waiting and depending on nature. *And yet nature is all-powerful.* There is no cure of disease, individual or social, that does not come through the action of her forces. Sick men are slowly learning to depend on them. Society has the same lesson to learn.

Particularly is the power of positive demands noticeable when what is proposed is the putting of all industries into the hands of the state. No other plan can possibly promise as much for the immediate future as does this one, and nothing can appeal with so much of positive force to working people. The violence of this remedy does indeed prevent us from adopting it; it is much as if what the doctor proposed were to take out the patient's heart and liver and to put them back again in reversed positions. We are deterred by the risks of the operation, yet the itching to do something is irresistible. The world doctor of the quack species, with his bold diagnosis and his promise of a cheap and rapid cure, is the fascinating and dangerous man. For trained thought there is, as the first difficult task, the detecting and the pointing out of the socially curative forces of nature — of the tendency of a society, as well as of a man, to get well if the laws of the system be

allowed to work. The task does not, indeed, end with this. There are positive things to be done in the way of reform. The socialist has no monopoly of definite proposals. The evils of the world may be understood, forces that pervert nature may be detected and repressed, and prosperity may be secured — though not in any cheap and instantaneous way.

Before speaking of these specific reforms, however, I wish to name a few more things that need to be generally known about the existing system of industrial society. This system is founded on competition, and its nature is to make the world as a whole rich. It has given to the American people what averages a thousand dollars apiece for men, women and children. Competition is called a war, but it is a rivalry in serving the public : that business man survives who can serve society best. If a man offers goods cheaper than others—if he is what we call a sharp competitor, what he is really doing is to give to people, in return for a given service on their part, more than others are offering. He outdoes his rivals in conferring benefits. If one's point of view is that of a business man contending for his position and having rivals who are trying to get away his trade, he may regard competition as a warfare. He may say that his rivals are trying to destroy him, and that self-defense compels him to try to destroy them. But how can he do it? Only by offering the utmost that it is possible for him to offer to the public. He must give all the goods that he can give for the money. Economics does not study the moral quality of the motive that is back of competition. Self-interest may set it working ; but what it does to the public is beneficent — and that we all need to know. If the world shall ever become an economic New Jerusalem, a city of literal gold, it must come about in this way. More and more perfect becomes the machinery that competition employs to gain its ends. It multiplies a hundredfold the product of labor. More and more automatic grow the engines; and more rapid, accurate and strong becomes the work of the tool. Touch the electric button and the machine shall work wonders for you ; and this effect is all traceable to that system of industry which enlists

every business man in a breathless race to outdo his rivals in serving the rest of the world.

The benefits of these services are, however, distributed unequally. What if they are apportioned unjustly? We have rich and poor; and it is said that these classes consist of plunderers and the plundered.

The first question here is not whether robbery exists, but whether it is due to competition. If the competitive process tends to stop it, our course is clear: we should make way for the forces of nature—let competition go on. This is one of the points at which a modern type of economic science can render a large service to humanity. It can meet, as an earlier science was unable to meet, the charge that the society in which we live is based on a principle of robbery. It has not always been possible to show how much labor can claim by right of creation; and the charge that the laborer creates all wealth, and that the capitalist filches away a part of it, has not been adequately met.

There is always a definite amount that labor can claim as its own separate product. The man creates something and the machine creates something. If we could see it, these amounts are definite. Labor owns a distinct fraction of the output of industry. It may, however, seem very difficult to decide what proportion of a product is due to labor alone. Send a man fishing with a canoe and fishing tackle owned by another man, and there is clearly a divided ownership in the catch. The fisherman owns a part of it and the capitalist—the owner of the canoe and the fishing tackle—owns the remainder. The part owned is in each case the part produced. But how much does the man alone produce, and how much do the canoe and tackle produce? Bring the fish to the shore and put them into two piles. Can you say of one, “This was caught by a man without canoe and tackle,” and of the other, “This was caught by a canoe and tackle without a fisherman?” Every fish is in reality a joint product: every fin or scale of a fish is such. What this means in the business world is that down to the finest tissues in the products of social industry there is

joint production. Every thread in a piece of cloth and every peg in a shoe owes its existence to labor and capital acting together : neither of them creates anything without the other.

There is a definite part of the product of industry, I have said, that is distinctly imputable to labor. With a little more time at my disposal, I could make an effort to prove this proposition, and to show, further, that the tendency of competition is to give to labor the share of the products that it creates. This is a momentous proposition, but modern political economy is able to prove it. If competition has its way, the men who run the machinery of the future will get their natural share of the goods that will result from the process. I do not say that they will, in fact, always get them ; but that is because competition does not work without obstructions. What we do know is that, if they fail to get them, it is because competition sometimes fails to do its work. Upon the obstacles in the way of competition, not upon competition, are we prepared to charge the dishonesty that attends modern industry. We are working according to a system that is at bottom fair in its dealings.

The indictment against society is, however, not yet fully met. What if, even with perfect honesty, it deals hardly with the working man ? It may give him what he creates and still give him little, because it only permits him to create a little : it may restrict his opportunities. Keeping still in mind what competition tends to do, we say that the system is widening the opportunities of labor. The workman's share of gains, being an honest share, tends to become larger. The amount of wealth imputable to mere labor tends to increase ; and with this increase there is a basis for an increase in wages.

What an employer can pay is limited in the long run by what he can gain by the workman's presence. Not for a long time is it possible for him to give to a laborer more than the laborer gives to him. The question of rising wages is a question of increasing productive power on the worker's part. Competition is putting the workers of the world into more and more fertile fields for labor. Fertility means not only that the

whole crop is large, but also that the part which is imputed to a working man is large, and that the man's wages increase correspondingly. The industrial world, with its whole equipment of farms and mills and shops and railroads and ships and canals and stocks of goods, is like a field which men till for a living. If this whole environment is rich and fertile, mere labor will signify much and get much. When competition adds shop to shop and machine to machine, it is multiplying the wage-paying power of society and making society pay laborers according to its new power.

There is a final count in the indictment against the social state. At best, it is said, its tendencies are undemocratic. Here is seemingly one point to be surrendered ; for nothing if not plutocratic is the business world. It has its captains of industry — and they are captains indeed, for they command their followers in the most autocratic way. They have a power over them which no governmental official could possibly have. Their millions of dollars are growing toward the limit of billions : the gulf between the extremes of society is widening.

Is even that true? In a sense the world is plutocratic, and I believe that it will be so to the end of time ; but in a finer sense it is democratic. If every man's possessions, small and great alike, were to be multiplied by ten, there would be less to choose between the status of a worker and that of a multi-millionaire than there is to-day. Not in mere possessions, but in the well-being that comes from possessions, such a multiplying of the means of production would have a leveling effect. As capital increases, wages rise. A Vanderbilt cannot have a thousand millions instead of a hundred, unless the country gets more and better railroads and more goods for the railroads to carry. An Astor cannot become a billionaire unless cities have more and better buildings. A Stewart or a Wanamaker cannot do it unless the buildings contain more and richer merchandise. All this means a more fruitful world for the workman to labor in. It means that he will produce a larger wage and get it. If he does get it, he will be the chief beneficiary of progress. He will never catch up with the billionaire

in possessions, but in the good time coming he may go far toward catching up with him in genuine well-being. Though he ever remain a mere wage earner, dependent on his toil, he may find that he gains on the rich man in the race for the actual enjoyments of life. The gulf between the richest and the poorest may in reality become a small one when the richest is a billionaire.

I was once passing a summer on *Somes' Sound*, at *Mt. Desert* ; and for recreation I hired a rowboat, fitted it with a sprit sail, and, with members of my family, voyaged from point to point on the island. One day there passed us a steam yacht that looked like an Atlantic liner for stateliness. There were fifty men sailing it and about five enjoying it. The latter was the number of passengers in my own little craft. As the proud steamer passed us it looked disdainful ; but it woke the echoes from the cliffs with its beautiful gong whistle, and it could not prevent us from enjoying them. I reflected with pleasure that I had not the coal bill to pay ; and I further reflected that there was little to choose, for real pleasure, between the condition of the party in the yacht and that of the one in my boat. Out of the breeze, the dancing water, the sunshine, the scenery, the echoes and the social pleasure that made up the total enjoyment of that summer's day, my own share was as great as the multi-millionaire's. If I had had no boat at all, the case would have been very different. I saw persons on the shore with no means of sailing, and I pitied them indeed. Between their state and mine there was a gulf ; between my state and that of the money prince there was no gulf worth mentioning.

Now, it is well within reason to hope that the worker of the future may reach the rowboat-and-sprit-sail level. At present he has no boat and may well envy the man who has one. But if he gets a modest craft, he will not need to envy the man with a steam yacht. The man with an assured and comfortable living is not greatly below the status of the man of uncounted wealth. "The abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep," says the Bible. We may look with equanimity on the

accumulating billions of the future. What their owners will get out of them is care. What we cannot help getting out of them is comfort and well-being. No possible condition can so far excel that of a workman of the future on four dollars a day as that condition will excel the present state of a man on two dollars. If the goods that a workman can enjoy be the test of wages, it is not beyond reason to expect them to be doubled and even quadrupled within a century or two.

It strains no one's credulity to claim great things for the effects of invention and discovery. What may not mechanical forces do? Old earth is still a sleeping giant. He has done some things for us : he has given us water power, steam and the crude first uses of electricity ; but all this is as nothing to what he can give. He has, as it were, lifted one drowsy finger to serve us. Fully wake him and your wildest imagination cannot take in the things that will happen. The waves that beat on the shores shall one day move our engines. The very turning of the earth on its axis shall give electrical energy, and nerves of copper shall carry that energy whither we will. It will be much as if the revolving earth were itself a driving wheel moving the smaller wheels of industry. The new machines will be embodiments of intelligence, and will become more and more automatic. Touch then the electrical buttons, and forms of utility and beauty will spring out of non-existence in Oriental profusion. They will fill the humbler homes of the world. Palaces will be built, of course, and the passers in the streets will get the benefit of them. Parks and pleasure grounds will multiply, and electric cars will take any one to them for a penny. All the world will travel. A journey around the earth will not count as a long one. Sojourning among the mountains or by the sea will not rate as a rare luxury. We shall democratize the finest pleasures. Withal we shall democratize culture. The school will keep its pupils till they reach maturity. Art and music will be at their command. With such things for enjoyment, the pupils will have the capacity to enjoy them. As recurring summers shall take us over the sea to strange and historic scenes, the traveling

will do for every one what it now does only for the *élite* and appreciative.

Pull down, then, the barns and build larger, capitalists of the twentieth century ! Add mill to mill, railroad to railroad, bank to bank, ship to ship. Your billions will do something for you; but they will do more for us — the democracy of the future. But pause! between us and all that is written one tremendous *if*. *If* only natural law works, *if* the world develops after its kind and unperverted, *if* forces of evil and of ignorance do not blight the prospect — then these things will happen. Here lies a second practical work that the state demands from scholarship; and the task is big enough to tax its full power. As a first service, scholars are to know and to make known the good forces and tendencies of our social system; as a second, they are to point out and help to remove obstructions, and so to let nature work.

This is not saying that we are to create prosperity by act of Congress. *Fiat* prosperity is elusive indeed. Hard times and good times must long alternate like the seasons; and an administration can create what is called a business boom only as Columbus created an eclipse of the sun — by waiting for it to occur and then claiming the credit of it. It is dangerous to suggest that anything that will quickly usher in a prosperous season can be done by the government. If what we refer to is the slow and sure improvement that is made, as one decade with its alternations of business conditions follows another, there is something to be done. Not a quick turning of hard times into good ones, but the making possible and real of the more general improvement that extends through a century — this great work is within human power.

We may enable competition to do its work and to lift humanity, not as quickly as though a mountain range were tossed into the air, nor yet as slowly as a mountain range actually rises by geological causes, but rapidly enough to inspire all who see and understand the process. Natural economic law must have its way, if it is to do this work. It is now interfered with. The task of the state is to stop these interferences.

Positive reform is a new and higher type of *laissez-faire*, for it is compelling powers of evil to let beneficent nature alone. "Hands off from competition in industry," is the word. Hinder not the grand dynamics of nature, but lay hands on whatever perverse agent may now presume to offer hindrances. The work is not simple; for it is not obvious what is natural and what is not. It is hard to see what task can be imposed on human thought which is more important than that of making a clear separation of what is natural from what is unnatural in organized life.

We have, for instance, a trust problem to solve. This can be accomplished only by the finest discriminations. A blind rush at the supposed enemy will not do it. Shall we simply say that the whole principle of combination is abnormal? Shall we bid our citizens to charge at a trust, wherever they see one, like a herd of bulls at a red cloth? That would be using the amount of intellect that a bull uses. The problem calls for the most careful thinking. There is that in the trust which is good, and there is evil also. The difficulty is to separate them and to secure the good only. It is not easy, but with enlightened thought it is possible. We have also a railroad problem to solve, and we can solve it only in the same discriminating way. Zeal must be according to knowledge. All of the power to make cheap rates and to give good service that comes through combination must be left. The power to cripple some industries and to build up others—to show favoritism and to play into the hands of monopoly—must be taken away. This is a hard task; but it is within the power of men who think.

Again, we have to meet a many-sided labor question which is changing its shape under our eyes with much rapidity. Trade unions for fixing wages are the salvation of labor. On no account should we repress them: we should aim rather to extend them. Yet a perfectly free hand to do whatever unlawful things their interests or wishes may here or there dictate, the state cannot possibly leave to them. What shall be allowed and encouraged? What shall be prohibited? If we make prohibitions, how shall we enforce them? This task will tax the

utmost sagacity of statesmanship. Optimism says the issue can be successfully met, because it must be met if society is to survive. Scholarship confirms the opinion, but it does not belittle the difficulties in the way of successfully solving this problem.

There are factory laws to be made and enforced. Working in the mills that supply us with goods there are helpless classes to be protected. A guardianship over women and children has been assumed by the state, and it must be exercised with great wisdom. There are the ever-recurring problems of taxation, and they become more serious and baffling as personal property becomes greater. Bad taxation is a perpetual incentive to communism. Of inheritance taxes we shall hear more than we have yet heard. I do not say they are necessarily bad; but it is clear, without saying, that they are capable of going to lengths that would mean disaster. You can always confiscate a property if you tax it at a high enough rate. Here there is a line to be drawn with difficulty between good and evil. We are starting on a course the farther stretches of which are perilous, and we must call a halt when impulse would carry us farther.

We have a general corporation problem to solve. This stands first in the order of time. The thing to be done is not merely to protect the public from the corporation as a whole: it is to protect the owners from the managers. "Director" must not be a tainted word: it must not even suggest a subtle and modern form of iniquity. Not till the stock of a railroad is a good investment for a workman's savings — and that is some time in the future — will society be all that it should be. Can we make stockholders safe? Not by mere reformatory zeal; possibly we can do it through zeal and knowledge.

Is this not enough? The things that I have enumerated are not all. More and yet more will the state demand of the men who are trained to look below the surface. There must be many such men. Schools must everywhere do their best to furnish them.

We are misled by the success with which we do things that

chiefly demand crude strength. "A nation that can put down the rebellion can settle a question of currency," said a statesman. If strength or even patriotism were all that such a problem requires, our sixty-six millions of people would find the task light. There is energy enough available when an evil really threatens us and force alone can avert it. Call for a fighting body to repel an invasion, and you will get a million men in a day; but generalship may be lacking. Call for a following of voters to repel a perfectly obvious and dangerous attack on the state, and you will get the men; but the statesmanship that would tell them just what to do may be wanting as before. In either of these cases they will

Come as the winds come when forests are rended;
Come as the waves come when navies are stranded;

but if the way be not clear, — if the nature of the evil and the mode of removing it be doubtful, — impulsive patriotism may be about as destructive as winds and waves. As against the evils that are growing up in the modern state, humanity appeals to the school. As against impulsive and blind reforms that try to attack the evils, but would actually rend the state in the effort to save it, humanity appeals also to the school. Before men who can see there is a vision of the future that nature, if she had her way, would give to us. It is bright beyond the pictures that socialism presents. It is assured by the forces of evolution that have made society what it is — *if* only we will let them work. Shall the vision become reality? The insight that makes this possible is the gift of scholarship to the people.

JOHN BATES CLARK.